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INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 4639  
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RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/CHJUSMAGK SEOUL KOR PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/COMUSFK SEOUL KOR PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR PRIORITY  
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC//J-5// PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 001606

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SUBJECT: ROK RELIEVED DPRK NOT MAKING ISSUE OF COLLISION OF  
ROK BARGE AND DPRK FISHING BOAT

Classified By: AMB. ALEXANDER VERSHBOW. REASONS 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) At 2:25 a.m. on August 12, the 658 ton "Dongi No.1," a South Korean barge, collided with an unnamed North Korean fishing vessel in North Korean territorial waters approximately 8 km northeast of Jangjon, a port on the DPRK's eastern coast. The ten crewmen of the South Korean barge admitted to having been asleep at the time, leaving only their captain to steer the boat. Following the collision, which sank the DPRK fishing boat, two of the four North Korean fishermen were pulled from the water by the crew of the barge, but the other two North Koreans remain missing and are presumed to be dead. The South Korean vessel suffered damage to its hull, but none of its crewmembers were injured.

The barge was in North Korean waters because it was transporting sand it had collected at Jangjon back to the South Korean port of Geoje.

¶2. (C) MOFAT Inter-Korean Policy Division officers told us that their hearts sank when they heard the news because tensions between North and South had already been running high as a result of the Mount Kumgang shooting incident. They say they have been very pleased that the DPRK has thus far chosen not to try and publicly link the two issues. Ministry of Unification officer J.R. Kim stated that they viewed the DPRK's decision to allow the South Korean crew to return to the ROK without detaining them as a very positive gesture. He added that DPRK officials seemed to view the accident as understandable, given the time at which the collision took place, but that there has been no official contact between ROK and DPRK officials following the accident. He said there have only been public announcements made by their respective governments, as reported in the media.

¶3. (C) Since 2000, there have been a total of eight accidents involving South Korean ships in North Korean waters. In each case, the North allowed all of the vessels and crewmembers involved to return to the ROK, citing humanitarian reasons.

VERSHBOW